

It would be a mistake to accuse Buddhism itself of indifference to such improvements. One of the cardinal principles of this religion is social service in the highest sense of the term, and Japanese history abounds in inspiring examples of such service done by Buddhists in all ranks of society. Bestowing material comfort on his fellow-men, however, is not the true end of a Buddhist's social welfare work. He has, so to speak, a double purpose in view. It should not only serve as a means of earning religious merit for his own soul, but it should also help his brethren to turn their thoughts from the more pressing problems of daily existence to the high and lasting things of the Spirit, and thus pave the way for their ultimate salvation. A Buddhist, therefore, is not supposed to grow angry or be deeply disappointed at the ingratitude of men, because charity for him is as much for his own spiritual benefit as for the relief of others.

Buddhism has only too often been interpreted negatively and has thereby been exposed to a charge of unfitness for an age of progress. It has been accused of pessimism and fatalism, love of passivity, and everything else unsuitable for an era of international competition. That the present state of social and international relations is far from desirable no one will dare to deny ; and much good will certainly be done in the way of alleviating the fever of rivalry and jealousy if some of the "negative" teachings of Buddhism are put into practice. But it is not fair to insinuate that this religion is opposed to progress or science, or that it is essentially negative in its attitude towards life. I have already hinted at a more positive motive behind the Buddhist practice of almsgiving. Let me cite another instance, namely the negative form of the Buddhist commandments. The first of these runs : "You should not destroy life." Following this precept to the letter, you would be driven to the absurdity of refusing to use a vermicide. Disinfectants would have to be banned as involving the destruction of countless bacteria, the lowest forms of plant life. You would have to leave your fatherland at the mercy of an invading horde because resistance would mean war. Since even a vegetable diet requires the destruction of plant life, the logical outcome of following the inhibition slavishly to the letter would be slow and ignominious suicide. But self-destruction, whether by one's own hands or by passively falling a prey to starvation, disease and vermin, would be in itself a distinct violation of the great commandment.

No ! This first Buddhist inhibition, like all the rest, is really positive and constructive in spirit. By the best Dhyana teachers in Japan it has been so interpreted, being paraphrased thus : "You should value life, both in yourself and in others." By deprecating the *needless* destruction of life, it implies in itself all the other inhibitions, for instance those against loose living, falsehood and slander, and the use and sale of alcoholic drinks. For these things constitute offences against life itself, and the injunction to value life in all sentient things amounts to an injunction to obey the highest laws of the universe. The *Dharma* or *Dhamma*, as these laws in their totality are called in Buddhism, comprises not only the natural laws with which modern